

French Onion Soup – Comfort du Jour

Leave it to the French to take a mountain of sliced onions, a bit of broth and a few Provencal herbs and transform them into a heavenly, melt-in-your-mouth soup. The dismal weather that has become something of a default around here this winter has had me in the soup mood, and this one is astonishingly simple—from ingredients to technique. Don't rush cooking the onions. They need time to caramelize properly (about two hours on the stove and longer in the oven or slow cooker), but your reward for patience is a luscious bowl of classic French comfort food that is guaranteed to warm you up in these final weeks of winter.

INGREDIENTS (ABOUT 8 SERVINGS)

4 pounds sweet onions, sliced
1 stick unsalted butter
1 1/2 teaspoons [Herbes de Provence seasoning](#)* (see notes)
1 bulb [roasted garlic](#)
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
1/2 cup dry wine (red or white, for deglazing the pot)
8 cups (2 quarts) low-sodium broth or stock (beef or vegetable)
Crusty French bread slices (toasted, for serving)
Shredded gruyere or Swiss cheese (about 2 Tbsp. per serving)

*NOTES

Herbs de Provence is a blend of seasonings native to the Provencal region of France, and the one I used includes thyme, rosemary, garlic, lemon peel and lavender. This seasoning is aromatic and typically used somewhat sparingly, but it is such a central flavor to French onion soup, I've used a good amount in this large batch.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Slice onions about 1/4" thick, preferably from stem to root ends, rather than into rings. For this recipe, I think it's helpful to have the onion pieces generally the same size, and this method of slicing helps to achieve that.
2. Place a heavy Dutch oven over low heat, and melt the stick of butter in it. Add the onions at the same time as the butter if you'd like. But if you are using a slow cooker, melt the butter first, then toss the onions thoroughly to coat before cooking on low setting. Season with salt and pepper. Stir the onions around in the pot, and resist the urge to turn up the heat. Proper caramelization is important for this recipe, and it's a long, slow process. Happily, you don't have to stand over it constantly; as long as you stir the onions occasionally, it's fine.
3. After an hour or so, start watching for signs of browning on the bottom of the pot. This signals the beginning of caramelization and once it begins, it proceeds more quickly. Stir more frequently from this point, but do not increase the heat.

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4. When caramelization is complete, the onion mixture will be golden in color and will begin to look like it's frying rather than simmering—this is because the moisture content has fully dissipated. Add the herbs de Provence, roasted garlic, salt and pepper.
5. Pour the wine into the pot, and use your utensil to scrape up any browned bits that have stuck to the pot. The acidity of the wine will dissolve those tasty bits back into the onion mixture.
6. Add the stock, bring to low boil and then reduce heat to simmer, covered, for a couple of hours.
7. Serve the soup in warm bowls or crocks, place the toasted bread on top, then scatter shredded Gruyere or Swiss over the bread. If your bowls are broiler-safe, put them on a baking sheet and broil just long enough to make the cheese gooey. Alternatively, you could put the bowls in the microwave for about 30 seconds, or go high-tech with a kitchen torch and brûlée the cheese into blissful melty goodness.